DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 212 195 HE 014 644

TITLE	Preparation for College in the 1980s: The Basic Academic Competencies and the Basic Academic Curriculum. Project EQuality.
INSTITUTION	College Entrance Examination Board, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	81
NOTE	19p.; For related document, see HE 014 643.
AVAILABLE FROM	The College Board, 888 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10106.
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Education; Advisory Committees; Articulation (Education); *Basic Skills; College Bound Students; *College Preparation; College School Cooperation; Curriculum Evaluation; Educational Improvement; *Educational Quality; Equal Education; Higher Education; Listening Skills; Logical Thinking; Mathematics; Reading Skills; *Secondary Education; Speech Skills; Study Skills; Urban Areas; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS	*Project EQuality

ABSTRACT

A statement regarding what is needed in academic preparation for college in the 1980s, which was developed during 1980-81 under th aegis of the College Board's Project EQuality, is presented. The work of school and college teacher in cooperation with other professionals addresses expectations about six basic academic competencies that should have been developed in high school by college-bound students: reading, writing, listening and speaking, doing mathematics, reasoning, and studying. Brief thoughts also are expressed about six subject-matter areas that constitute the basic academic curriculum that should have been covered: English, mathematics, history/social studies, natural science, foreign or second language, and visual and performing arts. Philosophical and operational definitions are offered for the basic academic competencies, based on a composite of the views expressed by the first year's participants in Project EQuality. The plan is to state the basic subject-matter areas in terms of learning outcomes rather than simply course content or number of years studied. The statement evolved in three contexts. The first involved more than 40 test development committees and the council on Academic Affairs of the College Board in cooperation with teachers. The second phase focused on the definition of basic academic competencies needed to do college-level work through urban dialogues involving representatives of schools and colleges serving large numbers of inner city students. The third phase was a three-day symposium. Twenty-four dialogues, four in each subject-matter area, will be conducted by Project EQuality during 1981-82. (SW)

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PREPARATION FOR COLLEGE IN THE 1980s

The Basic Academic Competencies and the Basic Academic Curriculum

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The College Board

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First reprinting November 1981.

The Basic Academic Competencies and the Basic Academic Curriculum

This statement of what academic preparation for college in the 1980s ought to be represents the collective judgment of more than 400 school and college teachers and administrators. It was hammered out in the course of countless meetings conducted during 1980-81 under the aegis of the College Board's Project EQuality. It is intended to amplify the information provided in a booklet describing the project and entitled, Project EQuality.* *It is presented for consideration by the members of the College Board and other schools and colleges, by public authorities, and by the public at large.*

In a variety of settings during 1980-81, school and college teachers and administrators, working together with other members of the educational community, identified two major components of what they thought academic preparation for college ought to be in the 1980s. This statement

*A copy of the booklet, *Project EQuality*, may be obtained by writing to: Project EQuality, The College Board, 888 Seventh Avenue, New York, New York 10106.

speaks in terms of expectations about six Basic Academic Competencies that should have been developed in high school by college-bound students—reading, writing, listening and speaking, doing mathematics, reasoning, and studying. It also expresses some brief thoughts about six subject-matter areas that constitute the Basic Academic Curriculum that should have been covered—English, mathematics, history/social studies, natural science, foreign or second language, and visual and performing arts.

The participants in Project EQuality endorse both of these concepts equally and see them as interrelated.

Background of the Statement

The College Board received initial guidance and inspiration in its plan from discussions in September 1980 with distinguished educators and friends of education. They influenced the Board's decision to devote resources and energy to the pervasive national concern over the quality of education. Held in New York and Washington, D.C., these discussions centered around the "pieces" of the quality issue that needed consideration and that could best be addressed by the College Board. The advisers —Rosedith Sitgreaves Bowker, Kenneth Clark, Dennis Gray, Fred Hechinger, Harold Howe II, Francis Keppel, Carl Marburger, Scott Thomson, Jacqueline G. Wexler, Willard W. Wirtz, and Stephen J. Wright—urged the Board to initiate action quickly to address these concerns. They felt strongly that the Board was particularly well suited to this task because of its unique membership base of high schools, colleges, school systems, and educational agencies; its charter purpose to ease the transition from high school to college; its past success in bringing members of the secondary and postsecondary institutions together on matters of mutual concern; and its organizational strength which would make it possible to sustain and coordinate over time the array of activities necessary to improve American education. The initiatives they encouraged evolved into Project EQuality. The concern had been inspired in part by a

consistent (decade-long) Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) score decline and a report on that decline, *On Further Examination*, issued in 1977 by 21 respected educators.

The Statement—a major result of the first year of this decade-long project—hardly constitutes the last word on the subject, and certainly is not the ultimate outcome of Project EQuality. On the contrary, it is intended to prompt at least as many questions as it answers and to provoke a broad national dialogue that will lead to a national consensus about what constitutes preferred patterns of preparation for college and how these patterns might be most effectively developed and implemented in the secondary school curriculum over the next 10 years.

Many Discussions Led to Consensus

The Statement evolved in three contexts. The first involved the College Board family, as represented on more than 40 test development committees and most particularly the Council on Academic Affairs. In this phase of activity, the College Board sought the help of school and college faculty members in developing a revitalized, shared concept of the kind of subject-matter preparation needed for entry to selective colleges in the 1980s. During the first half of 1980-81, more than 200 school and college teachers explored a series of critical questions both by questionnaire and in committee meetings. Using this advice, the Council

on Academic Affairs prepared a statement of preferred patterns of college preparation in the 1980s, expressed in terms of learning outcomes in six subject-matter areas.

The second phase was inspired by the College Board's Advisory Panel on Minority Concerns and approached the problem from a somewhat different perspective. Responding to an observation by participants in the first phase that special attention should be given to the needs of students going to less selective and open institutions, the Advisory Panel focused its efforts on the definition of basic academic competencies needed to do college-level work. The competencies described in this paper were initially developed over the course of seven "urban dialogues" involving representatives of schools and colleges serving large numbers of inner-city students. The urban dialogues took place in Atlanta, Chicago, Hartford, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Nashville, and Washington. They were supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

These two lines of inquiry converged in the third phase when some 60 selected participants from the earlier meetings joined other school and college faculty members and administrators, and representatives of education associations and public authorities to form a broadly representative group of 120 which convened in St. Louis in May 1981 for a three-day symposium, also supported by funds from the Ford Foundation.

Subject-matter cannot be learned without the requisite competencies and the

competencies cannot be developed without reference to subject-matter content. Thus far, however, only the Basic Academic Competencies have undergone the necessary discussion and refinement to permit them to be presented in detail here. Twenty-four dialogues, four in each of the six subject-matter areas, will be conducted by Project EQuality during 1981-82 in order to bring the definition of the Basic Academic Curriculum to the same stage of development as has now been reached for the Basic Academic Competencies.

The Basic Academic Competencies

The following philosophical and operational definitions of Basic Academic Competencies are a composite of the views expressed by the first year's participants in Project EQuality.

Using a draft statement of competencies originally developed for the Board's Council on Minority Concerns by Dennis Gray of the Council for Basic Education, participants in the seven urban dialogues and in the Project EQuality symposium in St. Louis deliberated, refined, and finally came to agreement on its present form.

A Philosophical Definition

- Basic Academic Competencies are developed abilities; they are the outcomes of learning and intellectual discourse. They are acquired when there are incentives and stimulation to learning and when there is an

encouraging learning environment. There are different levels of competency; they can be defined in measurable terms. They are academic. They are basic.

- Basic Academic Competencies are interrelated to and interdependent with the basic subject-matter areas. Without such competencies, the knowledge of literature, history, science, languages, mathematics, and all other disciplines is unattainable.
- Basic Academic Competencies are not substitutes for drive, motivation, interest, intelligence, experience, or adaptability. Nor are basic academic competencies social coping skills even though we recognize that coping skills are crucial to success in school, life, and work. Coping skills are simply another important matter which we have decided not to subsume under the area of Basic Academic Competencies.
- Basic Academic Competencies provide a link across the disciplines of knowledge although they are not specific to the disciplines. Teaching that is done in ignorance of, or in disregard for, such competencies and their interrelationships to each of the subject-matter areas is inadequate if not incompetent.
- Basic Academic Competencies provide a way to tell students what is expected of them. The knowledge of what is expected is crucial to effective learning; its absence dooms much of learning to inanity.

The high consistency of results in the dialogues held in urban centers and at the

St. Louis Symposium suggests that there is substantial reliability to the current listing. What follows has the legitimacy of participation by many individuals. The support of college people suggests these competencies have intrinsic validity for improving the chances for success in learning at the first-year level in college—possibly lowering the immense burden of remediation now done by many colleges. The support of the schools suggests that these competencies *can* be developed in high school. These conditions create both a favorable climate and a substantive base for future action by interested parties.

The Operational Definition

Following are descriptions of each of the six competencies in terms of the developed abilities that high school students ought to have.

Reading Competencies

- The ability to identify and comprehend the main and subordinate ideas in a written work and to summarize the ideas in one's own words.
- The ability to recognize different purposes and methods of writing, to identify a writer's point of view and tone, and to interpret a writer's meaning inferentially as well as literally.
- The ability to separate one's personal opinions and assumptions from a writer's.
- The ability to vary one's reading speed and method (survey, skim, review, question, and master) according to the type of

material and one's purpose for reading.

- The ability to use the features of books and other reference materials, such as table of contents, preface, introduction, titles and subtitles, index, glossary, appendix, bibliography.
- The ability to define unfamiliar words by decoding, using contextual clues, or by using a dictionary.

Writing Competencies

- The ability to conceive ideas about a topic for the purpose of writing.
- The ability to organize, select, and relate ideas and to outline and develop them in coherent paragraphs.
- The ability to write Standard English sentences with correct:
  - –sentence structure
  - –verb forms
  - –punctuation, capitalization, possessives, plural forms, and other matters of mechanics
  - –word choice and spelling.
- The ability to vary one's writing style, including vocabulary and sentence structure, for different readers and purposes.
- The ability to improve one's own writing by restructuring, correcting errors, and rewriting.
- The ability to gather information from primary and secondary sources; to write a report using this research; to quote, paraphrase, and summarize accurately; and to cite sources properly.

Speaking and Listening Competencies

- The ability to engage critically and constructively in the exchange of ideas, particularly during class discussions and conferences with instructors.
- The ability to answer and ask questions coherently and concisely, and to follow spoken instructions.
- The ability to identify and comprehend the main and subordinate ideas in lectures and discussions, and to report accurately what others have said.
- The ability to conceive and develop ideas about a topic for the purpose of speaking to a group; to choose and organize related ideas; to present them clearly in Standard English; and to evaluate similar presentations by others.
- The ability to vary one's use of spoken language to suit different situations.

Mathematical Competencies

- The ability to perform, with reasonable accuracy, the computations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division using natural numbers, fractions, decimals, and integers.
- The ability to make and use measurements in both traditional and metric units.
- The ability to use effectively the mathematics of:
  - –integers, fractions, and decimals
  - –ratios, proportions, and percentages
  - –roots and powers
  - –algebra
  - –geometry.

- The ability to make estimates and approximations, and to judge the reasonableness of a result.
- The ability to formulate and solve a problem in mathematical terms.
- The ability to select and use appropriate approaches and tools in solving problems (mental computation, trial and error, paper-and-pencil techniques, calculator, and computer).
- The ability to use elementary concepts of probability and statistics.

Reasoning Competencies

- The ability to identify and formulate problems, as well as the ability to propose and evaluate ways to solve them.
- The ability to recognize and use inductive and deductive reasoning, and to recognize fallacies in reasoning.
- The ability to draw reasonable conclusions from information found in various sources, whether written, spoken, tabular, or graphic, and to defend one's conclusions rationally.
- The ability to comprehend, develop, and use concepts and generalizations.
- The ability to distinguish between fact and opinion.

Studying Competencies

This set of abilities is different in kind from those which precede it. They are set forth here because they constitute the key abilities in learning how to learn. Successful study skills are necessary for acquiring the

other five competencies as well as for achieving the desired outcomes. Students are unlikely to be efficient in any part of their work without them.

One further difference must be expressed: activities related to acquiring the basic studying competencies will fail unless students bear in mind the role of their attitude in the learning process. That attitude should encompass a sense of personal responsibility for one's own progress, a desire to make full use of the teacher as a resource, and a willingness to conduct themselves in ways that make learning possible for their classmates as well as themselves.

- The ability to set study goals and priorities consistent with stated course objectives and one's own progress, to establish surroundings and habits conducive to learning independently or with others, and to follow a schedule that accounts for both short- and long-term projects.
- The ability to locate and use resources external to the classroom (for example, libraries, computers, interviews, and direct observation), and to incorporate knowledge from such sources into the learning process.
- The ability to develop and use general and specialized vocabularies, and to use them for reading, writing, speaking, listening, computing, and studying.
- The ability to understand and to follow customary instructions for academic work in order to recall, comprehend, analyze, summarize, and report the main ideas from reading, lectures, and other academic expe-

riences; and to synthesize knowledge and apply it to new situations.

- The ability to prepare for various types of examinations and to devise strategies for pacing, attempting or omitting questions, thinking, writing, and editing according to the type of examination; to satisfy other assessments of learning in meeting course objectives such as laboratory performance, class participation, simulation, and students' evaluations.
- The ability to accept constructive criticism and learn from it.

Late in the course of deliberations surrounding Project EQuality in its first year, a seventh area was suggested for inclusion in the Basic Academic Competencies. It was inspired by some learning activities which appear to occur in relation to the arts, laboratory experiments, spatial relations, and television. Variously called "observing," "perceiving," and "viewing," it could not be developed and refined to the same degree as the other six competencies. However, a tentative definition is being drafted and will be used as a basis for further discussions.

The Basic Academic Curriculum

College entrance requirements traditionally have been expressed in terms of number of years of study in a variety of specified subjects. Given its greatest legitimacy with the conceptualization of the "Carnegie unit" in

the 1930s, this method of expressing the curricular expectations of college applicants needs reexamination for many reasons.

First, it is now widely recognized that the content and difficulty of high school courses, even though bearing the same label, may vary widely from school to school. More important, education in preparation for college—as, indeed, college education itself—must take into account radical developments in the world and American society that were never contemplated when the labels for the traditional academic curriculum were devised.

- We have become part of a global community drawn by the technologies of communication and transportation, and we must acknowledge the contribution of many groups to the world's cultures in teaching, for example, history and world literature.
- We have been enriched as a nation by the diversity of our people and must acknowledge the contribution of many groups to our nation's culture in the same ways.
- We have entered the atomic and space ages but have yet to understand them.
- There has been an explosion of knowledge, particularly in the fields of ecology, energy, and genetics.
- We are becoming a society where information is a principal "product," and in which the ability to handle and use information—and new electronically based information technologies—is critical.

Early in the Project EQuality's first year, the College Board's test development and academic advisory committees and the Council on Academic Affairs concluded that in these circumstances and at least insofar as preparation for selective colleges is concerned, study in English, mathematics, history/social studies, natural sciences, second language, and the visual and performing arts was essential. They tentatively defined what students should have accomplished in those areas in terms of *learning outcomes* rather than simply *number of years* studied.

Their working paper on subject-matter outcomes was carefully considered at the symposium in St. Louis. The participants generally agreed that the tentative statements of outcomes for each of the six subject-matter areas needed further development. But they found in them the basis for an unforeseen conclusion: Symposium participants stated unanimously that *all* students going on to college should be prepared in each subject.

The conveners of the symposium had anticipated that the participants, in defining subject-matter preparation for students who attend open institutions, would fall back on only two subjects—English and mathematics—as necessary for all college-bound students. Instead, they refused to accept this lower standard of expectation and declared that all young people going to college should have studied in the six subject-matter areas. The six subject-matter areas

that comprise the Basic Academic Curriculum are: English, mathematics, foreign or second language, history/social studies, natural science, and visual and performing arts.

In the fall of 1981, the Academic Advisory Committees of the College Board will develop definitions of the preparation that students should have in each of these subjects. The Council on Academic Affairs will use those descriptions in the winter of 1981-1982 as the basis for a preliminary formulation of the Basic Academic Curriculum. The formulation will then provide the basis for discussion at the 24 dialogues to be conducted during the spring of 1982 among school and college teachers and curriculum specialists.